

Pre-Reformation Reformers.

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princely power dictated. The schoolmen supplied them with arguments ; they merely, in fact, for the most part, reiterated what had been written on this subject during the mighty conflict of pope *versus* kaiser, and contemporary history translated their arguments into fact in many a bloody encounter with the forces of absolute kings, who presumed to enforce their own will or the dicta of the pope on the champions of liberty as liberty was then understood.

It is difficult to say when the religious reformation began. Both within and without the Church the reformer and even the revolutionist had been busy for fully a century. Nay, throughout the Middle Ages he had periodically lifted up his testimony in some form or other against abuse and error in the Church. Charlemagne and Alcuin, Agobard of Lyons and Claudius of Turin, Abelard, St Bernard, Arnold of Brescia, Roger Bacon, St Francis, even St Dominic and many more, were reformers after their own fashion. More recently, the cause of reform had been championed by the great councils convened at Pavia, Constance, and Basle, in the first half of the fifteenth century. They attributed supreme authority to a general council over the pope, made and unmade several popes, and deliberated for long years at a stretch on " a reform in head and members/* The scope of this reform can hardly be called revolutionary, though the dethronement of the pope from his absolute throne was certainly revolutionary enough. It was antipapal, not anti-hierarchical. It did not touch the doctrines of the Church ; it was opposed to radical, democratic measures ; it would have made the Church an ecclesiastical aristocracy instead of a papal theocracy. It would not tolerate a Hus, or a Wicklif, or other doctrinal anarchist. The Church must remain in doctrine and practice as it had developed on traditional lines.

Even this moderate reform ultimately proved impracticable. The deliberation of the Fathers of Pisa, Constance, and Basle had extremely little effect. The papacy rose phoenix-like from its ashes to wield all its old authority. The efficacy of these reforming efforts may be judged from the scandalous lives of most of the occupants of St Peter's throne in the latter half of the fifteenth century. A Sixtus IV., an Alexander VI., are bywords of infamy even in an age of infamies, both in the